

**Sinkyone Wilderness
State Park**
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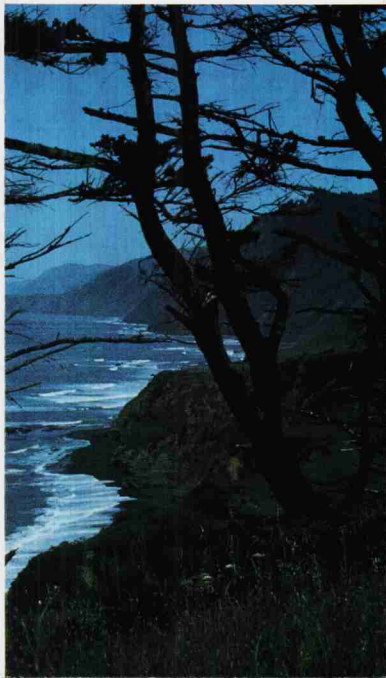
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*Design and layout by Ron Warr
Cover photo by Bob Mortensen*

92-20246

Sinkyone Wilderness State Park



The rugged wilderness that once characterized the entire Mendocino Coast can still be explored and enjoyed in the 7,367-acre Sinkyone Wilderness State Park. Since there are no main highways near the coast in this vicinity, the area has come to be called the "Lost Coast".

Two entry roads lead into the park. Both of them are steep, narrow, winding, and unpaved. In wet weather they are apt to become completely impassible. Four-wheel-drive vehicles are advisable in winter. Trailers and recreational vehicles are not recommended at any season.

There are no signs along the highway that point the way to Sinkyone Wilderness State Park. Access to the southwest end of the park is by means of Mendocino County Road 431, which intersects Highway 1 about three miles north of Rockport (17 miles west of Leggett) at milepost 90.88. Continue on Mendocino County Road 431 for six miles to reach Usal Campground. Access to the northwest end of the park is 36 miles from Redway on Briceland Road. The last nine miles leading to Needle Rock Ranch House are unpaved.

The park is characterized by rugged terrain - deep canyons and steep slopes rising to a north-south trending ridge some 2,000 feet above the sea. Along the shoreline, narrow black sand beaches lie at the base of nearly vertical 200-foot-high coastal bluffs. Bear Harbor, perhaps the best known cove in the park, was the site of a booming lumber operation at the turn of the century, one of the many little "doghole" ports along California's north coast that were used by coastwise sailing ships and later by steam schooners to load cargoes of lumber.

The climate in this area is cool and moist. Spring and fall are usually clear and pleasant. During the summer, particularly in July and August, fog banks tend to move in from the sea. The fog is usually high, which makes beach use pleasant. The rainy season begins in late October and about two-thirds of the average annual total occurs by March.

HISTORY

For thousands of years before the first Europeans arrived, the Sinkyone Indians lived in this part of the coast. They occupied permanent villages alongside streams and rivers, and moved out in family groups to hunt and forage in the hills during the summer. They also spent time along the coast fishing, gathering seaweed and shellfish, and hunting seals and sea lions.

Game was plentiful and nearly all animals were hunted or trapped. Black-tailed deer and Roosevelt elk were particularly important along with the occasional group capture of a grizzly or black bear. Seals and sea lions were speared at sea from large redwood canoes. When dead whales washed ashore, the meat was dried and stored for winter. Fish were an important source of food during the winter. All kinds of fish were caught, but the seasonal salmon run was especially important.

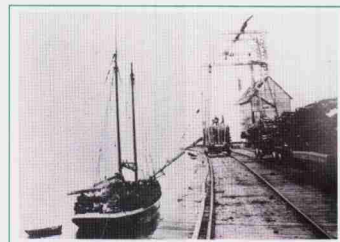
Sinkyone men wove hunting and fishing baskets, and made string and rope from an iris-leaf fiber. Women made baskets and hats, some of which featured overlay patterns made of bear grass, maidenhair fern, and the five-finger fern. Quail crests were also occasionally woven into the design. A dye made from red alder bark was used to create decorative patterns. Blankets were made by the women from strips of rabbitskins.

The Sinkyone built two kinds of houses: a circular, semi-subterranean house with a center pole, and a wedge-shaped lean-to. Both were walled with redwood slabs and madrone bark. Each village also included a ceremonial dance and sweat lodge. The Sinkyone also built brush enclosures for temporary shelters.

The Sinkyones believed that all animals and birds were people who had been transformed because they failed to follow the rules formulated by Nagaicho, the "great traveler," who had created everything. Once, it was said, he punished wickedness by flooding the earth and saving just one sister and brother to re-people it.

With the advent of the gold rush and statehood for California, white settlers and adventurers began to push into northwestern California. The Sinkyones were friendly at first and offered no threat. But in 1856, Indians throughout the north coast area were rounded up and forced onto reservations where they were neglected and abused. Most of them escaped and went back to their ancestral homes, only to find themselves unwelcome in their own land. By 1860, conflict between Indians and whites was so frequent and so violent that many referred to the situation as the Mendocino County Indian War. In May 1864, Lieutenant William Frazier and the Battalion of Mountaineers were enlisted to attack the Sinkyone. The little village near Needle Rock was destroyed. The Sally Bell Grove is named for a Sinkyone woman who survived the attack by running into the woods and hiding.

The Kiser Brothers ranch dominated the Bear Harbor-Needle Rock area from 1870 to 1900. Farm houses were built. Orchards were planted. Fields and pastures were fenced. Land was leased and rights-of-way sold to tanbark and lumber operators so they could bring their products down from the mountains and across the agricultural land. At the coastal landings, wooded meadows were converted to huge lumber yards where forest products were shipped to market from wharves and by means of wire chutes. Above, in the timber zones, line camps dotted the hillside, or were nestled on flats.



Usal, 1895

Most park visitors today assume that human beings have had little impact on this area. But every trail, road, or flat spot has been modified by human activity. Game trails were turned into pathways for pack mules loaded with tanbark for the leather tanneries of San Francisco. Roads were carved and graded for lumbering operations. Open areas and marine terraces were farmed and used to pasture sheep and cattle. Occasionally, what appears to be a wagon road or a modern jeep trail is actually an abandoned railroad right-of-way. Logging railroads reached back into the mountains behind Needle Rock, Bear Harbor and Usal.

Logging operations continued until well into the 20th century and wood products of various kinds were shipped to market from Usal, Needle Rock, Anderson's Landing, Northport and Bear Harbor/Morgan's Rock. Northport was not much of a port, but lumber schooners were able to take on their cargoes by means of a "wire chute," - a cable and block system that could run wood products from a bluff down to waiting schooners. Built in 1875, the Northport "chute" was one of the first of its kind on the coast.

The Usal Lumber Company was formed in 1888 by T. and D. Merrill, a father-son team of lumbermen and furniture manufacturers from Michigan, who purchased 3,761 acres of property from a previous owner and built a wharf, lumber mill, railroad, and company town. The Merrills ran out of timber in 1892 and sold their holdings to the Michigan Trust Company. That firm brought in a bright, young manager by the name of Robert Dollar, who re-activated the company, bought a used steamship, *The Newsboy*, to keep transportation costs under control, and ran a successful logging operation until 1901 when the mill closed down. Shortly after the lumber mill closed down it burned to the ground and the wharf was badly damaged by a winter storm. But Dollar went on to fame and fortune in the coastwise and trans-Pacific steamship business. Usal remained a small, isolated village with a store, "hotel," and a small population. The area was acquired by the Georgia-Pacific Corporation after World War II and logging operations resumed.



Needle Rock, 1897

The Wolf Creek Timber Company built a modern steel-framed wood product processing facility at Jackass Creek in 1951. They also created the company town of Wheeler, complete with family housing, a store, bunkhouses, a cookhouse, trailer area, and a school. Financial problems caused the company to be sold in 1953, and it changed hands several times before it was acquired by Georgia Pacific. In 1969, in order to eliminate liability problems, the two "company towns" at Usal and Wheeler were burned. G-P continued its logging operation (expanding all the way north to Bear Harbor) until 1986 when it sold out to the Trust for Public Land.

Sinkyone Wilderness State Park was created in 1975 when the first 3,430 acres were acquired at Needle Rock. The park expanded dramatically in 1986 when TPL sold 3,000 acres to the California State Park System for park purposes.

CAMPING

All campsites are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Visitors are asked to self-register at Usal Campground or the Needle Rock Ranch House. Use fees and park rules are posted at both locations. Car camping is permitted only at Usal Campground. All of the other camping areas within the park are hike-in. Trash containers are located at Usal Campground, but not at the other camping areas. Please pack out whatever you pack in. Treated drinking water is available at Needle Rock, but you're welcome to bring in your own drinking water. Surface water should be treated by boiling for at least one minute prior to use.

PRIMITIVE CAMPSITES

Usal Campground: This area is the southern access point for the Lost Coast Trail. Fifteen campsites are accessible by two-wheel drive vehicle. Each campsite has a picnic table and fire ring. Pit toilets are located nearby. Trailers and recreational vehicles are not recommended.

Barn Camp: Two campsites are located among fir and alder trees and offer a view of the ocean. A small stream runs nearby. A trail provides access to the beach. Campsites are located 75 yards from the Needle Rock Barn parking area.

Stream Side: Three widely separated campsites offer privacy. One site is located on a knoll with a panoramic ocean view. All three sites are about 0.4 miles north of the Needle Rock Ranch House parking area.

Jones Beach: Three campsites are located in a eucalyptus grove with a creek nearby. The campsites have a view of the ocean and are about a ten minute walk from the Jones Beach trailhead. Jones Beach Cove is 0.2 miles down a steep trail from the camp.

Low Gap: Five campsites are located on an inland ridge surrounded by forest. Low Gap Creek is nearby. A 1.3-mile trail makes it possible to walk through the wilderness to the coast near Needle Rock. The campsites are accessible by two-wheel drive vehicle via County Road 431 just 2.5 miles from the intersection of County Roads 431 and 435.

Orchard Camp: Three campsites are sheltered by the remains of an early settler's apple orchard. It is a 0.4 mile hike to Bear Harbor Beach. The campsites are adjacent to the parking area at Orchard Trailhead. During periods of wet weather, Mendocino County Road 431 south of the Needle Rock Ranch House becomes impassable. During the winter, you may prefer to hike this 2.7-mile section.

Railroad Camp: Three campsites are located a short distance from Orchard Camp Trailhead in a towering grove of Eucalyptus trees planted along Bear Harbor Creek by early settlers. Two of the campsites are under the trees while the third is at the edge of the grove with a sunny exposure. Parking and directions are the same as for Orchard Camp.

Bear Harbor Camp: Three campsites are located in a meadow that surrounds Bear Harbor Cove. Bear Harbor beach is a popular area for surf fishing, beachcombing and abalone diving. Parking and directions are the same as for Orchard and Railroad Camps.

TRAIL CAMPS

Three trail camps are located between Bear Harbor and Usal along the Lost Coast Trail. Each of these camps features a fire ring and pit toilets. Fires are prohibited at Anderson Camp.

Wheeler: Four campsites are located in a valley near Jackass Creek. The beach is located 0.4 mile away. Wheeler was a lumber mill town in the 1950s, and the remains of building foundations can still be seen. Parking and directions are the same as for Orchard Camp. From the parking area it is a moderately difficult 4.3-mile hike along the Lost Coast Trail.

Little Jackass Creek: This trail camp is a strenuous 3.5-mile hike south of Wheeler. Two campsites are located at the edge of the Sally Bell Grove and two more are closer to the beach. Little Jackass Creek runs nearby. The Sally Bell Grove contains some majestic old-growth redwoods. The most convenient parking area is the one at Usal Campground. From there it is strenuous 7.5-mile difficult hike along the Lost Coast Trail.

Anderson Gulch: Two campsites are located in a small meadow with a view of the ocean in the distance. Stream access is nearby. The parking area is located at Usal Campground. From there, Anderson Gulch is a moderately difficult five-mile hike along the Lost Coast Trail. Campfires are prohibited at this location.

GROUP CAMPING

Camping facilities are limited. Each campsite will accommodate up to eight persons. Groups of more than eight persons can be accommodated by special request. Contact the park to obtain a Group Use Application.

EQUESTRIAN CAMPING:

Horse camping is permitted at Usal Campground, Needle Rock (a corral is available near the visitor center), and Wheeler. Trailers can be parked at Four Corners, Low Gap, and Usal campgrounds. A four-wheel drivetow vehicle is recommended.

PARK RULES

The following rules and regulations are in effect at Sinkyone Wilderness State Park. They are designed to ensure visitor safety and protect the natural features of the park.

DOGS

Dogs are welcome at Usal Campground and the Barn and Orchard primitive camps near Needle Rock. Dogs must be kept on a leash at all times (six foot maximum) and must be confined in an enclosed vehicle or tent during the night. Dogs are permitted on roadways and on the beach at Needle Rock, Bear Harbor and Usal. In order to protect wildlife, dogs are not permitted on trails. A fee is charged for each dog that stays in the park overnight. Noisy, vicious, or dangerous dogs will not be allowed to remain in the park.

HUNTING

Hunting is prohibited as is the possession of operable, loaded, or readily accessible firearms.

COLLECTING

Flowers, rocks, plants, mushrooms, animals, artifacts and other park features are protected by state law and may not be disturbed or collected. Collection of driftwood is permitted from beach areas. Visitors may also collect berries, fruits and nuts (maximum of five pounds per person per day) for personal consumption.

TIDE POOLS

Marine invertebrates that inhabit the intertidal zones are protected except for certain species at certain times of the year. A valid sportfishing license is required. Check the current sportfishing regulations for species, season, size and bag limitations.

FIRES

Fires are permitted only in park fire rings provided for that purpose. Use of cooking stoves is encouraged as gathering of dead and down wood is prohibited. Driftwood may be collected from the beach areas and burned for firewood. You are welcome to bring your own firewood, or purchase it at the Needle Rock Ranch House or from the patrol ranger at Usal Campground.

WOOD GATHERING

Gathering of wood (other than driftwood) is prohibited. Dead and down wood is part of the natural environment. Decaying wood and vegetation helps to build new soil, prevent erosion, provide food and shelter for animals, and allows the soil to hold more water.

VEHICLE USE

All vehicle travel is confined to designated roads. The speed limit in camping areas is 15 miles per hour. Unlicensed drivers, unlicensed vehicles, and off-road "green sticker" vehicles are prohibited.

MOUNTAIN BIKES

Bicycles are permitted on all park roads that are open to vehicle use. They are also permitted on a six-mile portion of the Hotel Gulch fire road. Bikes are not permitted on trails or the last four miles of the Wheeler fire road.

Sinkyone Wilderness Trails

LOST COAST TRAIL: This 22.1 mile-long trail runs from Usal Campground at the southern end of the park to Whale Gulch at the northern end. About a mile north of Whale Gulch, the trail enters the King Range National Conservation Area and continues north for another 30 miles to the mouth of the Mattole River. The trail provides challenges for both novice and experienced hikers. Allow three days and two nights to travel the trail section within Sinkyone Wilderness State Park.

Usal to Anderson, 5.0 miles: A steep climb out of Usal sets the pace for this difficult trail section which offers spectacular views.

Anderson to Little Jackass, 2.5 miles: A moderately difficult 1.5 mile hike separates these two trail camps. Views of the ocean can be enjoyed through the old growth redwoods at Northport Gulch. Seals are frequently seen on the beach here.

Little Jackass to Wheeler, 4.5 miles: The most difficult portion of the whole trail is this steep climb over the mountain separating two creeks. Points of interest include Anderson Cliffs and a hanging valley with a vernal pool.

Wheeler to Bear Harbor, 4.3 miles: This three hour hike goes from sea level at Wheeler Trail Camp to an 800-foot-high ridge and then back down to sea level. This portion of the trail affords some spectacular views and a beautiful redwood grove.

Bear Harbor to Orchard Camp, 0.4 miles: This part of the trail is both pleasant and nearly level. Bear Harbor Cove is a nice location to enjoy a picnic or explore tide pools.

Orchard Camp to Needle Rock, 2.7 miles: This portion of trail follows a lightly-used park road. It makes a nice one and one-half hour hike, especially during the winter when the road is impassable to vehicles.

Needle Rock to Whale Gulch, 2.2 miles: This moderate two-hour hike begins at Needle Rock Barn. Half a mile out, the trail connects with the Low Gap Trail. There is a fork in the trail at the Jones Beach primitive campsite. Turn left to reach Jones beach, or turn right and continue to Whale Gulch where the trail goes on into the King Range National Conservation Area. The trail provides views of offshore rocks, sag ponds and a waterfall.

LOW GAP TRAIL, 1.3 miles: This moderate hike begins at mileage marker 23.0 on Mendocino County Road 431. The trail follows the original wagon road to Needle Rock and travels through a nice second-growth redwood forest.

NEEDLE ROCK BEACH TRAIL, 0.2 miles: This short, steep "staircase" trail connects the visitor center area with a two-mile-long black sand beach that is great for exploring.

JONES BEACH TRAIL, 0.3 miles: This short, steep trail provides beach access.

MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS

Bicycles are permitted on all park roads that are open to vehicle use, plus six miles of the Hotel Gulch fire road. Bikes are not permitted on trails or the last four miles of the Wheeler fire road.

EQUESTRIAN TRAILS

Horses are permitted on vehicle roads and hiking trails with the exception of the trail between Usal Campground and Wheeler. Horses are welcome on the Hotel Gulch fire road between Usal Campground and Wheeler.

NEEDLE ROCK RANCH HOUSE ROOM RENTALS

Two 12'x15' unfurnished bedrooms are available for rent in the upstairs portion of this very rustic turn-of-the-century ranch house. Rooms may be reserved for a maximum of three consecutive days. Maximum occupancy is four persons per room. Pets, alcohol, and smoking are prohibited inside the house. Renters must supply their own beds, bedding, and other furnishings, and must do their own cleanup before vacating the premises. Garbage cans and cleaning supplies are furnished. A picnic area is provided in the backyard for cooking and dishwashing. Restroom facilities are located outside. Quiet hours are from 10pm to 7am. Reservations can be made up to nine weeks in advance. Contact the park for reservation forms and fee information. Rooms that have not been reserved are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

VISITOR CENTER

The downstairs portion of the Needle Rock Ranch House serves as a visitor center. The center is staffed and operated by volunteers who are available during most of the year to answer questions, provide information, and to handle campsite registration. The center features exhibits about the area's natural and human history. Printed trail guides, interpretive publications, and firewood are available for purchase.

